WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A computerized method comprising:

receiving, at a payment network, a first information packet from a merchant, the first information packet including a cost of a financial transaction between the merchant and a customer and a credential presented by the customer as a payment for the financial transaction;

using the credential to determine, with the payment network, account information that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a financial institution and authorization information that allows debit access to the identified financial account;

generating, at the payment network, a second information packet comprising the account information and the authorization information;

selecting one of a plurality of transaction networks over which to transmit the second information packet to the financial institution;

transmitting from the payment network the second information packet to the financial institution using the selected transaction network, with a request to perform a debit transaction from the identified financial account for at least a portion of the cost of the financial transaction.

2.   The method of claim 1, further comprising using the credential to determine, with the payment network, second account information that identifies a second financial account maintained by the customer at one of the financial institution and a second financial institution and second authorization information that allows debit access to the identified second financial account.

3.   The method of claim 2, further comprising:

determining, at the payment network, an apportionment of the cost among the first and second financial accounts;

generating, at the payment network, a third information packet comprising the second account information, the second authorization information, and a portion of the cost to apply to the second financial account in accordance with the apportionment; and

wherein the second information packet further includes a second portion of the cost to apply to the financial account in accordance with the apportionment.

1   4.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   receiving, at the payment network, a response from the financial institution

3 indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction; and

4   transmitting, from the payment network, an authorization code to the merchant

5 indicating approval or denial of the financial transaction in accordance with the response

6 received from the financial institution.

1   5.   The method of claim 4, further comprising:

2   performing, with the payment network, a risk analysis of the financial

3 transaction; and

4   determining, with the payment network, whether to provide a guarantee of the

5 financial transaction to the merchant based on the risk analysis,

6   wherein the authorization code further reflects whether the guarantee is

7 provided.

1   6.   The method of claim 1, wherein:

2   the account information comprises a primary account number for the identified

3 financial account; and

4   the authorization information comprises a personal identification number

5 assigned to the customer for accessing the identified financial account.

1   7.   The method of claim 1, wherein selecting one of a plurality of

2 transaction networks comprises:

3   performing, with the payment network, a risk analysis of the financial

4 transaction; and

5   selecting the transaction network based on the risk analysis.

1   8.   The method of claim 1, wherein selecting one of a plurality of

2 transaction networks comprises selecting an automated clearing house ("ACH") network.

1   9.   The method of claim 1, wherein selecting one of a plurality of

2 transaction networks comprises selecting a debit system.

1   10.   The method of claim 1, wherein selecting one of a plurality of

2   transaction networks comprises selecting a direct network path to the financial institution

3   from the payment network.

1   11. The method of claim 1, wherein the credential comprises a payment

2   network account number assigned to the customer to access the payment network.

1   12. The method of claim 11:

2   wherein the credential further comprises a personal identification number

3   (PIN); and

4   wherein the method further comprises verifying, with the payment network,

5   the PIN is associated with the payment network account.

1   13.   The method of claim 1, further comprising crediting, with the payment

2   network, a loyalty program for the customer in response to execution of the financial

3   transaction.

1   14.   The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the first information packet

2   comprises receiving the first information packet from an Internet merchant and wherein the

3   financial transaction is an Internet-based financial transaction.

1   15.   A computerized method comprising:

2   receiving, at a payment network, a first information packet from a merchant,

3   the first information packet including a cost of a financial transaction between the merchant

4   and a customer and a credential presented by the customer as a payment for the financial

5   transaction;

6   using the credential to determine, with the payment network, account

7   information that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a financial

8   institution and authorization information that allows debit access to the identified financial

9   account;

10   generating, at the payment network, a second information packet comprising

11   the account information and the authorization information;

12   transmitting from the payment network the second information packet to the

13   financial institution using an automated clearing house (ACH) network, with a request to

14   perform a debit transaction from the identified financial account for the cost of the financial

15   transaction.

1   16.   A computerized method comprising:

2   receiving, at a payment network, an information packet from a merchant, the

3   information packet including a cost of a financial transaction between the merchant and a

4   customer and a credential assigned to the customer;

5   using the credential to determine, with the payment network, account

6   information identifying a plurality of financial accounts maintained by the customer at one or

7   more financial institutions;

8   using the credential to determine, with the payment network, authorization

9   information for each of the identified financial accounts that allows access to the identified

10   financial accounts;

11   determining, at the payment network, an apportionment of the cost to apply to

12   each of the identified financial accounts;

13   generating, at the payment network, a plurality of authentication packets for

14   each of the identified financial accounts, each authentication packet comprising account

15   information for one of the identified financial accounts, authorization information for the

16   identified financial account, and the determined apportionment of the cost to apply to the

17   identified financial account; and

18   transmitting from the payment network, each of the authentication packets to

19   the respective financial institution at which the financial account is maintained.

1   17.   The method of claim 16, further comprising receiving, at the payment

2   network, a response to one of the authentication packets indicating denial of the debit

3   transaction; and

4   transmitting an additional authentication packet comprising account

5   information for a second one of the identified financial accounts different from the financial

6   account associated with the denied authentication packet, authorization information for the

7   second financial account, and the determined apportionment of the cost comprised by the

8   denied authentication packet.

1   18.   The method of claim 17, further comprising:

2   receiving a response to the additional authentication packet indicating denial

3   of the debit transaction; and

4   transmitting, from the payment network, an authorization code to the merchant

5   indicating denial of the financial transaction.

1   19.   The method of claim 16, further comprising:

2   receiving, at the payment network, a response to each of the authentication

3   packets indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction;

4   transmitting, from the payment network, an authorization code to the merchant

5   indicating approval or denial of the financial transaction, wherein the authorization code

6   indicates denial of the financial transaction if at least one of the authentication packets

7   indicates a denial of the debit transaction.

1   20.   The method of claim 16, wherein determining an apportionment of the

2   cost comprises apportioning the cost equally among the identified financial accounts.

1   21.   The method of claim 16, wherein determining an apportionment of the

2   cost comprises using an allocation apportionment specified by the customer.

1   22.   A method comprising:

2   receiving, at a payment network, account information that identifies a plurality

3   of financial accounts maintained by a customer at one or more financial institutions and

4   authorization information for each of the identified financial accounts that allows debit access

5   to the respective identified financial account;

6   verifying, with the payment network, the account information and

7   authorization information for each of the identified financial accounts;

8   associating a credential to the customer account information and the

9   authorization information; and

10   transmitting, from the payment network, an enrollment approval for the

11   customer.

1   23.   The method of claim 22, wherein verifying the account information

2   and the authorization information comprises for each of the identified financial accounts:

3   transmitting, from the payment network, the account information and the

4   authorization information to the financial institution associated with the identified financial

5   account with a request to authenticate the information for the identified financial account;

6   receiving, at the payment network, a response from the financial institution

7   authenticating the information.

1   24.   The method of claim 22, further comprising receiving, at the payment

2   network, an allocation apportionment for each of the identified financial accounts indicating

3   the portion of future financial transactions to allocate to each of the identified financial

4   accounts.

5   25.   The method of claim 22, wherein associating the card number

6   comprises generating, with the payment network, a unique account number for the customer

7   to access the payment network.

1   26.   The method of claim 22, further comprising transmitting a request

2   from the payment network to a card embossing facility to magnetically encode the unique

3   account number on a card.

1   27.   A payment network comprising:

2   a communications device;

3   a processor;

4   a storage device; and

5   a memory coupled with the processor, the memory comprising a computer-

6   readable medium having a computer-readable program embodied therein for directing

7   operation of the payment network, the computer-readable program including:

8   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, a first

9   information packet from a merchant, the first information packet including a cost of a

10   financial transaction between the merchant and a customer and a credential presented by the

11   customer as a payment for the financial transaction;

12   instructions for determining from the credential, with the processor,

13   account information that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a

14   financial institution and authorization information that allows debit access to the identified

15   financial account;

16   instructions for generating, with the processor, a second information

17   packet comprising the transaction information, the account information, and the authorization

18   information;

19   instructions for selecting, with the processor, one of a plurality of

20   transaction networks over which to transmit the second information packet to the financial

21   institution; and

22   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, the

23   second information packet to the financial institution using the selected transaction network,

24   with a request to perform a debit transaction from the identified financial account for at least

25   a portion of the cost of the financial transaction.

1   28.   The payment network of claim 27 wherein the computer-readable

2   program further includes instructions for determining from the credential, with the processor,

3   second account information that identifies a second financial account maintained by the

4   customer at one of the financial institution and a second financial institution, and second

5   authorization information that allows debit access to the identified second financial account.

1   29.   The payment network of claim 28, wherein the computer-readable

2   program further includes:

3   instructions for determining, with the processor, an apportionment of the cost

4   among the first and second financial accounts;

5   instructions for generating, with the processor, a third information packet

6   comprising the second account information, the second authorization information, and a

7   portion of the cost to apply to the second financial account in accordance with the

8   apportionment; and

9   wherein the second information packet further includes a second portion of the

10   cost to apply to the financial account in accordance with the apportionment.

1   30. The payment network of claim 27, wherein the computer-readable

2   program further includes:

3   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, a response from

4   the financial institution indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction; and

5   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, an authorization

6   code to the merchant indicating approval or denial of the financial transaction in accordance

7   with the response received from the financial institution.

1   31.   The payment network of claim 28 wherein the computer-readable

2   program further includes:

3   instructions for performing, with the processor, a risk analysis of the financial

4   transaction; and

5   instructions for determining, with the processor, whether to provide a

6 guarantee of the financial transaction to the merchant based on the risk analysis,

7   wherein the authorization code further reflects whether the guarantee is

8 provided.

1   32.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein the instructions for

2 selecting one of a plurality of transaction networks comprise:

3   instructions for performing, with the processor, a risk analysis of the financial

4 transaction; and

5   instructions for selecting, with the processor, the transaction network based on

6 the risk analysis.

1   33.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein:

2   the communications system is coupled with an automated clearing house

3 ("ACH") network; and

4   the instructions for selecting one of a plurality of transaction networks

5 comprise instructions for selecting the ACH network.

1   34.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein the instructions for

2 selecting one of a plurality of transaction networks comprise instructions for selecting a debit

3 system.

1   35.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein the instructions for

2 selecting one of a plurality of transaction networks comprise instructions for selecting a direct

3 network path to the financial institution from the payment network.

1   36.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein:

2   the account information comprises a primary account number ("PAN") for the

3 identified financial account; and

4   the authorization information comprises a personal identification number

5 ("PIN") assigned to the customer for accessing the identified financial account.

1   37.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein the credential comprises a

2 payment network account number assigned to the customer to access the payment network

3 and a personal identification number (PIN) and wherein the computer-readable program

4 further comprises instructions for verifying, with the processor, the PIN is associated with the
5 payment network account.

1   38.   The payment network of claim 27, wherein the computer-readable
2 program further comprises instructions for crediting, with the processor, a loyalty program
3 for the customer in response to execution of the financial transaction.

1   39.   A payment network comprising:.
2   a communications device;
3   a processor;
4   a storage device; and
5   a memory coupled with the processor, the memory comprising a computer-
6 readable medium having a computer-readable program embodied therein for directing
7 operation of the payment network, the computer-readable program including:
8   instructions for receiving, account information that identifies a
9 plurality of financial accounts maintained by a customer at one or more financial institutions
10 and authorization information for each of the identified financial accounts that allows debit
11 access to the respective identified financial account;
12   instructions for verifying, with the processor, the account information
13 and authorization information for each of the identified financial accounts;
14   instructions for associating, with the processor, a credential to the
15 customer account information and the authorization information; and
16   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, an
17 enrollment approval for the customer.

1   40.   The payment network of claim 39, wherein the instructions for
2 verifying the account information and the authorization information comprise instructions for
3 each of the identified financial accounts:
4   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, the account
5 information and the authorization information to the financial institution associated with the
6 identified financial account with a request to authenticate the information for the identified
7 financial account;
8   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, a response from
9 the financial institution authenticating the information.

1   41.   The payment network of claim 39, wherein the computer-readable

2   program further comprises:

3   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, an allocation

4   apportionment for each of the identified financial accounts indicating the portion of future

5   financial transactions to allocate to each of the identified financial accounts.

1   42.   The payment network of claim 39, wherein the computer-readable

2   program further includes instructions for generating, with the processor, a unique account

3   number for the customer to access the payment network.